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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, NL
SUBJECT: CONFESSIONAL PARTIES STUMBLE DOWN ROAD TOWARD UNITY

1. SUMMARY. CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC APPEAL (CDA), UNITY PARTY OF THREE MAJOR DUTCH CONFESSIONAL PARLIAMENTARY PARTIES, HELD ITS FIRST NATIONAL CONGRESS IN THE HAGUE AUGUST 23. CDA OBJECTIVE OF TAKING ANOTHER STEP IN WELDING PARTIES TOGETHER ON NATIONAL LEVEL IN PREPARATION FOR CONTESTING 1977 ELECTIONS WITH SINGLE SLATE OF CANDIDATES RAN INTO SERIOUS TROUBLE WHEN ONE OF PROTESTANT PARTIES BALKED AT PROPOSAL TO MAKE PARTY LEADERSHIP POSITIONS AVAILABLE TO ANYONE REGARDLESS OF DECLARED ADHERENCE TO CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES. FUTURE OF CDA AND OF AT LEAST ONE POLITICAL LEADER HAS BEEN PUT INTO QUESTION AS RESULT OF CLASH OVER THIS ISSUE, ALTHOUGH IT LIKELY BOTH WILL SURVIVE. END SUMMARY

2. THREE MAJOR DUTCH CONFESSIONAL PARTIES (CATHOLIC PEOPLES-KVP, ANTI-REVOLUTIONARY-ARP, AND CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL UNION-CHU) HELD NATIONAL CONGRESS OF LONG-SOUGHT UNITARY MOVEMENT (CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC APPEAL) IN THE HAGUE AUGUST 23. CONGRESS, WHICH WAS ATTENDED BY SOME 1200 DELEGATES WHO WERE SELECTED ON BASIS OF RELATIVE STRENGTHS OF THT THREE MERGING PARTIES, WAS FIRST FULL-BLOWN GATHERING OF CONFESSIONALS ON NATIONAL LEVEL. CDA HAS FUNCTIONED AS OPERATING POLITICAL PARTY FOR SOME TIME
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ON LOCAL LEVEL IN MANY PARTS OF COUNTRY, BUT THREE CONFESSIONALS STILL MAINTAIN THEIR OWN PARTY APPARATUS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL AND HAVE NEVER PUT UP CANDIDATES UNDER NATIONAL CDA BANNER. AUGUST 23 CONGRESS WAS TO HAVE BEEN ANOTHER STEP IN THAT

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DIRECTION, POINTING TOWARD 1977 ELECTIONS FOR SECOND CHAMBER
OF STATEN GENERAAL.

3. RATHER THAN HELPING SMOOTH WAY TOWARD CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC
UNITY, CDA CONGRESS DEMONSTRATED SPLIT AMONG CONFESSIONALS
WHICH COULD JEOPARDIZE CHANCES FOR REAL UNITY OR AT LEAST DELAY
PROCESS OF MERGER. DISPUTE BETWEEN KVP AND CHU ON ONE HAND
AND ARP ON THE OTHER, IS OVER WHETHER LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN
CDA SHOULD BE FULLY OPEN TO ANYONE OR WHETHER PARTY LEADERS
AND CANDIDATES FOR POLITICAL OFFICE MUST BE DECLARED CHRISTIANS
WHO TAKE THE BIBLE AS STARTING POINT FOR POLITICAL ACTION.
BOTH SIDES WOULD OPEN BASIC PARTY MEMBERSHIP TO ANYONE.

4. CONGRESS, SUPPORTED BY KVP AND CHU AND MINORITY OF ARP
MEMBERS, VOTED AGAINST FORCING PARTY LEADERS TO TAKE A
RELIGIOUS LOYALTY OATH. ARP, LED BY ITS FLOOR LEADER IN SECOND
CHAMBER, AANTJES, OBJECTED STRONGLY TO DECISION AND RESERVED
ITS POSITION ON WHETHER TO CONTINUE IN THE CDA. ARP PARTY
EXECUTIVE, WHICH SPLIT ON QUESTION AT CONGRESS, IS TO MEET THIS
WEEK TO CONSIDER ITS POSITION. AANTJES, WHO UNTIL NOW HAS BEEN
A STRONG PROPONENT OF A NATIONAL CDA (A POSITION THAT HAS ALSO
BEEN BACKED BY HIS PARTY RANK AND FILE) SHOULD BE ABLE TO CARRY
THE DAY FOR HIS POSITION IF HE DECIDES TO RIGHT FOR IT. SHOULD
HE DO SO, HOWEVER, HE COULD SERIOUSLY DAMAGE PROSPECTS FOR THE
NATIONAL CDA. ON OTHER HAND, IF HE FIGHTS FOR THE ISSUE AND
LOSES WITHIN HIS PARTY, MANY OBSERVERS THINK THAT HE WOULD HAVE
NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO QUIT POLITICS. THAT PROSPECT IS OF
SPECIAL CONCERN TO OTHER PARTIES IN THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT
SINCE AANTJES HAS BEEN A KEY FIGURE IN HOLDING THE FRAGILE
LEFT-CENTER COALITION TOGETHER.

5. COMMENT. CLEARLY THE KVP AND CHU AND SOME ARP SUPPORTERS
BELIEVE THAT A CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY COMPLETELY OPEN AT
THE TOP WOULD BE STRONGER, IN TERMS OF ELECTORAL APPEAL, THAN
A RESTRICTED PARTY. IN THIS VIEW, THE CDA IS SEEN AS A REAL
ALTERNATIVE CENTER PARTY WHICH WOULD ALSO DRAW SUPPORT FROM
THE MODERATE LEFT AND RIGHT. ON THE OTHER SIDE, AANTJES, AND
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HIS ARP SUPPORTERS, SEEM TO BE MOTIVATED MORE BY AN EMOTIONAL
ATTACHMENT TO PRINCIPLE ON THIS QUESTION THAN BY ANY QUESTION
OF POLITICAL GAIN. ALL RECENT POLITICAL POLLS INDICATE THAT
A UNIFIED CDA WOULD FARE BETTER AT THE POLLS THAN THE THREE
PARTIES WOULD BY RUNNING SEPARATELY. THE KVP AND ARP WOULD
ESPECIALLY BE HURT BY RUNNING UNDER THEIR OLD LABELS ACCORDING
TO THESE SOUNDINGS. IN AANTJES' OWN CASE, THERE SEEMS TO BE
NO QUESTION AT ALL OF PERSONAL POLITICAL ADVANTAGE AND THERE
IS A REAL POSSIBILITY THAT HE MAY PERMANENTLY DAMAGE HIS OWN
POLITICAL CAREER. DESPITE AANTJES' STRONG PERSONAL ATTACHMENT
TO THE IDEA OF IMPOSING THE RELIGIOUS TEST ON CDA PARTY OFFICIALS
(A POINT ON WHICH HE HAS GOTTEN STRONG SUPPORT AT GRASS ROOTS

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IN THE ARP) IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT HE (OR THEY) WOULD BE PREPARED TO GIVE UP ON THE CDA AT THIS POINT. THE THREE DUTCH CONFESSIONALS HAVE PUT A GREAT DEAL OF EFFORT AND CARE INTO THEIR PLANS FOR UNIFICATION AND HAVE BROUGHT THE CDA ALONG SLOWLY. ALL THREE PARTIES ARE STILL COMMITTED TO FULL MERGER BY THE FALL OF 1976, AND ARE LIKELY TO DO ALL THAT THEY CAN TO FIND SOME COMPROMISE POSITION ON THIS ISSUE.
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